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## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### JOHN STUDDY LEIGH: FIRST FOOTSTEPS IN EAST AFRICA?

*Harold G. Marcus and Melvin E. Page*

On January 8, 1892 John Studdy Leigh rose in a meeting room of the California Academy of Science building in San Francisco to deliver the inaugural lecture of the Geographical Society of California.<sup>1</sup> His talk on "Somali Land, or the Eastern Horn of Africa" described a journey along the coast and into the interior of Somalia. Much of the exposition concerned his adventures and observations on a trip to Harar, made while "disguised . . . as well as I could, as a Mahometan from India." Leigh also remarked that "Sir Richard Burton visited Hurrur in disguise in 1855, years after myself."<sup>2</sup> This extraordinary revelation, placing Leigh among the foremost explorer-adventurers in East Africa, appears to have attracted little attention; it was not even mentioned in the San Francisco newspapers. Although the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of California* circulated on an exchange basis throughout the world (the library of the Royal Geographical Society in London still holds the entire run of three issues), no comment on Leigh's claim seems to have come from geograph-

<sup>1</sup> John Studdy Leigh to Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, March 8, 1892, Corr. Block 1881-1910, Royal Geographical Society Archives [hereafter RGSA]. We wish to express our thanks to Mrs. M. B. Hughes, archivist of the society, for making photocopies of the Leigh correspondence available to us.

<sup>2</sup> J. Studdy Leigh, "Somali Land or the Eastern Horn of Africa," *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of California*, I, 1 (March 1893), 17, 25. The article was reprinted as a pamphlet (San Francisco, n.d.). Although the address first appeared in the *Overland Monthly*, second series, 19 (1892), 642-656, all subsequent citations will be to the version in the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of California*.

ical circles. Thus the question raised by his lecture remains: were the "first footsteps" in East Africa those of John Studdy Leigh?<sup>3</sup>

Leigh himself is a somewhat elusive historical figure. By his own admission he was "born on the same day as Prince Bismarck, viz: the 1st April 1815."<sup>4</sup> Although we now know almost nothing of his early life, he probably received an education with special emphasis on geology, and perhaps geography.<sup>5</sup> These interests led to his election in 1859 to membership in the Geological Society of London which he retained for twenty years.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1860s and early 1870s he ventured to South America, involved in mining ventures in Peru, Bolivia, and perhaps Chile.<sup>7</sup> Returning to London by 1879, he appears to have become familiar with the prospects of continued gold mining in the auriferous gravels of California's "Mother Lode." Perhaps his interest was whetted by John Charles DeVoy, who in 1881 was the London agent for the Cataract and Wide West Gravel Mining Company of Calaveras County, California.<sup>8</sup> When Leigh acted upon this new concern is uncertain, but by 1884 or 1885 he was living in San Francisco.<sup>9</sup> In 1889 he acquired mining rights

<sup>3</sup> Burton claimed to have been the first European to have visited Harar and characteristically titled his account of the journey *First Footsteps in East Africa* (London, 1856). The original but much shorter version appeared as "Narrative of a Trip to Harar," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* [hereafter *JRGS*], 25 (1855), 136-150. Burton's contention has been widely accepted by modern scholars; for example, see Fawn M. Brodie, *The Devil Drives: A Life of Sir Richard Burton* (New York, 1967), 106, and Caroline Oliver, "Richard Burton: The African Years," in Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Africa and its Explorers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Leigh to Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, March 8, 1892, Corr. Block 1881-1910, RGSA.

<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that Leigh, then only eighteen, was the co-author of a brief geological article: J. Leigh, Esq. and E. W. Binny, Esq., "Observations on a Patch of Red and Variegated Marls containing Fossil Shells at Collyhurst, near Manchester," *Proceedings of the Geological Society of London*, 2 (1833), 391-393; positive affirmation of his authorship is lacking. Personal communication from Miss S. R. Pearce for the Geological Society of London.

<sup>6</sup> Miss S. R. Pearce, personal communication.

<sup>7</sup> J. Studdy Leigh, "Peruvia, Bolivia and Chile," *Overland Monthly*, second series, 3 (1884), 527-541.

<sup>8</sup> Agreement between the Cataract and Wide West Gravel Mining Company and Benjamin B. Harrison, September 24, 1881, in Agreements, Book E, Calaveras County, California, Records Office [hereafter CCRO], 264-266. Also see Revocation of Power of Attorney, Cataract and Wide West Mining Company to John Charles DeVoy, January 3, 1882, in Agreements, Book E, CCRO, 263-264. On the mining of the region, see Mark B. Kerr, ed., *Mining Resources of Calaveras County* (n.p., 1898).

<sup>9</sup> Leigh presented his first geographical lecture in San Francisco early in 1884 but is not known positively to have been a resident until the following year. See *Langley's San Francisco Directory*, 26th edition (1885), 716.

and an option to buy the Cataract and Wide West mines,<sup>10</sup> which he promptly transferred to the Leigh Gravel Mining Company.<sup>11</sup> The diggings were unprofitable,<sup>12</sup> and Leigh admitted early in 1892 that his "important business" in California "has hitherto been an unsuccessful one."<sup>13</sup> In July 1893, shortly after his apparent business failure, Leigh resigned as secretary of the Geographical Society of California and passed into obscurity.<sup>14</sup>

It was probably his abiding interest in geology, and perhaps geography, which led the youthful Leigh to journey to eastern Africa. During the 1820s, employed as commercial agent by the London firm of Newman Hunt and Christopher,<sup>15</sup> he traveled along the coast from South Africa to Berbera<sup>16</sup> and perhaps to India as well.<sup>17</sup> He may have lived for a time on Madagascar, representing his firm's interests at the entrepôt of Majunga.<sup>18</sup> He claimed to have been present at the British "capture" of

<sup>10</sup> Agreement between the Cataract and Wide West Gravel Mining Company and J. S. Leigh, June 29, 1889, in Agreements, Book F, CCRO, 461-463.

<sup>11</sup> Agreement between J. Studdy Leigh and Leigh Gravel Mining Company, July 12, 1889, in Agreements, Book G, CCRO, 1. The Leigh Gravel Mining Company was incorporated on July 8, 1889 and issued 100,000 shares of capital stock at ten dollars per share. This information is derived from stock certificates numbered 73, 126, and 155 in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Millsfield, Reseda, California.

<sup>12</sup> After reverting to their previous owners, the mines were sold at auction for delinquent taxes on June 30, 1893. *Calaveras Prospect*, July 1, 1893, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Leigh to Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, March 8, 1892, Corr. Block 1881-1910, RGSA.

<sup>14</sup> *San Francisco Call*, December 26, 1893, 9. We have been unable to locate any record of Leigh's death. Due to the earthquake and fire of 1906, few death records or cemetery reports for San Francisco remain; a survey of those located at the California State Library, Sacramento, and the Department of Public Health, San Francisco, did not reveal Leigh's name. Neither does the best, though admittedly incomplete, record for Calaveras County, Edith Jensen *et al.*, *California Mother Lode Records: Calaveras County* (n.p., 1962). A search of the records for the period between July 1893 and June 1898 found in the General Register Office, London, also proved negative. We wish to thank Mrs. Marian Marquardt of San Francisco for her assistance in several of these searches.

<sup>15</sup> Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks, Jr., eds., *New England Merchants in Africa: A History through Documents, 1802-1865* (Boston, 1965), 190-191, 200. Although the document cited, the journals of American consul at Zanzibar Richard P. Waters, refers both to a Mr. Lee and a Mr. Leigh, there is no doubt from the context and the chronology that they are the same person, John Studdy Leigh.

<sup>16</sup> J. Studdy Leigh, "Zanzibar and the Eastern Horn of Africa," *Overland Monthly*, second series, 10 (1887), 70-87. This paper was read originally on January 20, 1885 before the Geographical Society of the Pacific. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, January 21, 1885, 3. The journey from Brava to Berbera is described in Leigh, "Somali Land," 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> On June 16, 1885 Leigh lectured before the Geographical Society of the Pacific on "The Political Aspects of India," but does not seem to have published the paper. *Transactions and Proceedings of the Geographical Society of the Pacific*, 2 (1891).

<sup>18</sup> Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants*, 190.

Aden,<sup>19</sup> which would have placed him near the Horn in late 1838 or early 1839,<sup>20</sup> and in July 1839 he visited Mozambique, exploring "the principal of the numerous mouths of the river Zambezi."<sup>21</sup> He often called at Zanzibar, and in 1840 stayed for a short time on the island, a guest of the Sultan and his court.<sup>22</sup> During these years he also stopped at Mayotte, one of the Comoros, remaining on the island for several days of rest and observation.<sup>23</sup> At every point he seems to have satisfied his "desire to explore regions little known," making geological and geographical observations on the coast and up various rivers "some little distance inland," generally in small boats which were placed at his disposal.<sup>24</sup>

Leigh's contemporaries accepted his travels in eastern Africa as contributing to the furtherance of geographical knowledge, in recognition of which he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1845.<sup>25</sup> Three years later he responded by reading and then publishing his papers on the Zambezi mouth and Mayotte. The papers drew immediate praise from the president of the society, W. J. Hamilton, who twice mentioned Leigh's contributions while surveying the society's role in geographical endeavor.<sup>26</sup> Since then, the two articles generally have been accepted in academic circles; a recent survey of nineteenth-century travel literature on the Comoro Islands has praised the description of Mayotte as "the only good account of the life of the islanders."<sup>27</sup>

Leigh's most fascinating and controversial article, however, remains his account of a trip to Harar in 1838 or 1839. After witnessing the conquest of Aden, he traveled to Berbera, where he was received with great curios-

<sup>19</sup> Leigh, "Somali Land," 12.

<sup>20</sup> R. Hughes Thomas, *Treaties, Agreements, and Engagements between the Honorable East Indian Company and the Native Princes, Chiefs, and States* (Bombay, 1851), 283-285, and James O. Lunt, *The Barren Rocks of Aden* (New York, 1966), 39. The probable *terminus ante quem* for his journey was mid-February, 1839. Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants*, 200, 209.

<sup>21</sup> T. [sic] S. Leigh, "A Visit to the River Zambezi," *JRGS*, 19 (1849), 1-17. J. S. Leigh's authorship is confirmed in Leigh to Dr. Norton Shaw, June 11, 1849, Corr. Block 1841-1850, RGSA.

<sup>22</sup> Leigh, "Zanzibar," 72-73, 76.

<sup>23</sup> T. [sic] S. Leigh, "Mayotta and the Comoro Islands," *JRGS*, 19 (1849), 7-17. Authorship confirmed in Leigh to Shaw, June 11, 1849, Corr. Block 1841-1850, RGSA.

<sup>24</sup> Leigh, "River Zambezi," 1; Leigh, "Zanzibar," 76, 78, 83-84; Leigh, "Mayotta," 8.

<sup>25</sup> Note clipped to Leigh to Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, March 8, 1892, Corr. Block 1881-1910, RGSA. Leigh's name first appears on the list of members of the society in 1845. *JRGS*, 15 (1845), xxix.

<sup>26</sup> Annual Presidential Addresses of 1848 and 1849, *JRGS*, 18 (1848), xxxviii, and *JRGS*, 19 (1849), xlii.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Dubins, "Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature on the Comoro Islands: A Bibliographic Essay," *African Studies Bulletin*, 12 (1969), 142.

ity, "the first European that has visited . . . within . . . recollection."<sup>28</sup> The Englishman's attention soon turned to Berbera's economic life. The port was inhabited only during the six months of the southwest monsoon, from October to April. Arab, Zanzibari, and Banyan traders eagerly met the caravans that came from Harar and further south, all of which Leigh found "interesting." Commercial items included mocha-type coffee, "by which name it is known in Europe and elsewhere, and believed to come from Arabia," hides and skins, ivory, ostrich feathers, frankincense and myrrh, tragacanth, gum arabic, and ghee. Leigh also witnessed the arrival of a slave caravan which comprised about one hundred Abyssinian girls, who were priced from 25 to 125 thalers. All in all, Leigh's information about Berbera seems authentic, and there are no glaring mistakes or oversights. He caught the important facts about the periodic nature of the Berbera market, and the true origin of much of so-called Arabian coffee that found its way to Europe. He probably did visit Berbera, therefore, although he easily could have obtained his data by interviewing merchants at Aden. There is, however, no reason not to accept his word.

At Berbera, the voyager heard much about the difficulties of travel to Harar and the dangers involved for Europeans. Leigh concluded that he would make the effort to visit the mysterious city, "but not in European guise." For his passage he arranged with a certain Chief Yusuf and his tribe ("whose name I forgot") to pay an advance of cloth and beads, and upon return a further large sum, "which should in the meantime be deposited in secure hands." One of Leigh's companions was a renegade Portuguese Muslim from Goa who spoke adequate Somali; Leigh decided to use him as an interpreter during the caravan trip inland.

So I disguised myself as well as I could as a Mahometan from India, and being already much sunburnt, passed muster very well with a little additional pigment, by blackening my eyebrows and adopting other precautions, including, of course, the wearing of the turban. . . . I could speak some Hindoostanee as well as Arabic, and could even read as much of the Koran as would satisfy any inquisitive Mussulman, combined with the lessons my friend . . . would give me en route, and I already had acquired a considerable knowledge at Zanzibar of Mahometan ceremonies, including the one special point of their prayer attitudes.

So that observers would believe that he had returned to Aden, Leigh dispatched his boat across the Red Sea. He then commenced his march inland in a sixty-camel caravan accompanied by seventy to eighty men and women.

<sup>28</sup> This and all subsequent citations are from Leigh, "Somali Land," *passim*, unless otherwise noted.

Leigh's description of the road followed and his detailed recounting of caravan life certainly rings true, although quite possibly he obtained his information from informants. He may have blundered by placing the Afar (Dankali) along the Zeila-Harar road, even though his sentence does indicate his awareness that he traveled outside the limits of Afar territory: "Whilst passing to the south of the Danakil or Dankali country, we were compelled to keep up a constant watch at night, for this . . . tribe are, like the Dyaks of Borneo, not exactly head hunters, but murderers for the sake of murdering, and boasting of the numbers they have slain." The Britisher may have been misinformed about the specific human dangers of the caravan route, which largely passed through Ishaak Somali country. There is, of course, the real possibility that at this time either the Danakil or the Issa Somali were raiding along the road. Thus, the mistake is not exactly egregious and, indeed, authenticity is reinforced by Leigh's points of description of animal life, "including now and then bands of wild asses . . . which we found . . . almost impossible to approach." Finally, one is struck by the credibility of his account of a Galla toll station located just outside of Harar's jurisdiction. The post was garrisoned by "a fine body of men armed with spears alone, with features rather pleasing than otherwise . . . [who] greeted us in a friendly manner . . . The main business of the day was promptly entered into . . . packages . . . opened . . . from which they made their selection, resulting . . . in my having to submit to the loss of one of my three camel loads."

Close to the destination, "one of the most fanatical Mahometan cities in the world, I began to feel somewhat apprehensive with regard to the nature of our reception." He need not have worried; he and his group were treated normally, and only were "detained for some time at the gate whilst the amount of tribute or customs dues were being settled." After the formalities, Leigh was taken by some Arab traders to a house similar to those found in Brava; Harar was full of such wattle, white-washed buildings. His hosts served him pilau and kebab, certainly not a traditional Harari meal, but one which was eaten by resident foreign Muslim merchants and by rich local businessmen. It is strange, however, that Leigh only once mentioned *bolcus*, the mainstay of the traditional Harari diet, and then in a discussion about the town's exports. The Englishman followed this small oversight with another blunder: "Hurrur at that time was ruled by an emir, or sultan, named Othman." Quite possibly Leigh merely had forgotten the emir's correct name, Abu Bakr,<sup>29</sup> or perhaps the

<sup>29</sup> The same emir continued to rule Harar at the time of Burton's arrival. Burton, *First Footsteps*, 175.

name Sheikh Othman, a prominent highpoint overlooking the crater area of Aden, had been imprinted on his memory; also, there is a white tomb to a Sheikh Othman located about two and one-half miles north of Aden, near a Turkish-built aqueduct.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the reasons for Leigh's lapse of memory, his description of the ruler and his palace seems valid, even if marred by ethnocentrism:

Othman was a man somewhat beyond middle age and of imposing appearance, but to my possibly prejudiced eyes he seemed to have the spirit of fanaticism imprinted on his features, the result, probably, of pride of birth as a descendant of the Prophet. His so-called palace was a long, low building of one story, and windowless, and the furniture of the scantiest description, i.e., cushions only were arranged round the hall of audience.

Burton's description diverges little, although differently presented.<sup>31</sup>

Leigh found Harar's street scenes like other eastern cities, "but of course with a greater appearance of savagery; veiled women, many with upright carriage, balancing large earthen jars of water on their heads." The whole statement seems contrived. Muslim women in Harar rarely if ever appeared in *pardab*, and housewives in the town carried water pots on their backs, as was generally the case throughout Ethiopia. This serious discordancy immediately is balanced, however, by a general description of Harar which the Englishman could have obtained only from the evidence of his own eyes or from excellent informants; in no way could he have derived his information from Burton or from later authors.<sup>32</sup> At the time of Leigh's visit, the town was

<sup>30</sup> Othman's tomb was noted as a key feature of the Aden area by at least one of Leigh's contemporaries. Staord Bettesworth Haines, "Memoir, to accompany a Chart of the South Coast of Arabia, from the Entrance of the Red Sea to Misenát," *JRGS*, 9 (1839), 135.

<sup>31</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps*, 174-175.

<sup>32</sup> None of those who wrote about Harar include the same descriptive detail as the account of Leigh's claimed visit. See C. P. Rigby, "Remarks on the North-East Coast of Africa, and the Various Tribes by which it is Inhabited," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 6 (1841-1844), 66-94; W. Christopher, "Extract from a Journal kept during a Partial Enquiry into the Present Resources and State of North Eastern Africa, with Memoranda," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 6 (1841-1844), 375-402, reprinted in *JRGS*, 14 (1844), 76-103; C. J. Cruttenden, "Memoir on the Western or Edoor Tribes, inhabiting the Somali Coast of N. E. Africa," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 8 (1847-1849), 177-210, reprinted in *JRGS*, 19 (1849), 49-76. After Burton, the chief descriptions of Harar were based primarily upon personal observation: Gustav Adolf Haggemacher, "Reise in Somali-Lande, 1874," *Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen*, 10 (1875-1876), 1-45; G. M. Guilietti, "Viaggio da Zeila ad Harar," *Bollittino della Società Africana d'Italia*, 6 (1880), 365-382; Johann von Müller, "Tagebuch einer Reise durch das Gebiet der Gadabursi-Somali und

surrounded by a stone wall with twenty-four towers, and it was then said to contain about 8,000 houses and 500 huts besides no less than five mosques, of which the "jami," or cathedral was of considerable dimensions but of usual simple structure, — with a dome and flat roof supported by a number of stone pillars. From the roof was suspended more than one ostrich egg, the signification of which I never could ascertain.

The European did speculate, however, that the population of Harar was 35,000, an estimate which Burton did not attempt, and one which accords well with Egyptian records from the 1875-1885 period.<sup>33</sup>

Turning his attention to Harar's exports, Leigh again provided a description which not only seems authentic, but also would appear to indicate that he was, at least in this regard, a more perceptive observer than Burton.<sup>34</sup> Leigh listed Harar's exports as slaves, ivory, coffee, tobacco, safflower, mules, wheat, ghee, *holcus*, and ostrich feathers. More importantly, Leigh singled out *ch'at*, a narcotic plant, for special identification: "There is one product, unknown elsewhere, that goes by the name of kât and gât, the leaves of which are a favorite stimulant or narcotic." As for imports, the Englishman signified that there were "a great many articles in exchange, but principally cotton and silk goods, hardware and beads." Interestingly, Burton provided a much more complete list of imports: American sheeting, cottons, muslins, red shawls, silks, brass, copper sheeting, cutlery, trinkets, beads and coral, dates, rice, loaf sugar, gunpowder, and paper, among other things.<sup>35</sup> One can conclude, therefore, that both men had some special knowledge of Harar's economy. Burton undoubtedly obtained his information through actual experience; Leigh, on the other hand, might have derived his information by actual observation or from informants that he questioned at Berbera.

Did Leigh visit Harar as he claimed? This question cannot be answered definitively, although it is easy to suggest that he had some specialized knowledge of the "mysterious city" not found elsewhere and which might

Noli-Galla nach Harrar," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erkunde zu Berlin*, 19 (1884), 73-80, 104-122; Philipp Paulitschke, "Reise nach Harar und die nördlichen Galla-Länder, 1885," *Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen*, 31 (1885), 369-384, 460-474; Philipp Paulitschke, trans., "Cronistoria dell' insediamento del Governo dell' Harar e delle sue dipendenze del Chedivè di Egitto," *Bollittino della Società Africana d'Italia*, 11 (1892), 49-56; Gabriel Ferrand, "Notes sur la situation politique, commerciale et religieuse du Pachalik de Harer et ses dépendances," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de l'Est*, 8 (1886), 1-17, 239-244.

<sup>33</sup> Paulitschke, "Cronistoria dell' insediamento del Governo dell' Harar," 54-56; Haggenmacher, "Reise in Somali-Lande, 1874," 43-44.

<sup>34</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps*, 192.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

have been supplied by his own observations there. He made some mistakes, but they may be attributed to Leigh's powers of recollection as an old man, and they are all easily rationalized; moreover, his errors occurred only in the small details, never in the more important data. Perhaps the most basic doubt of his claim derives from the fact that he did not write about his extraordinary adventure shortly afterward; he hitherto had published the proceeds of his explorations, although none of his articles appeared until at least ten years after his experiences. Maybe he just never found the time to write about Harar, or perhaps he had lost his travel diary, his only documentary evidence, which of course could account for his later errors or for any reticence in presenting the story to his always skeptical gentlemen colleagues of the Royal Geographical Society. By 1892, at the end of a life that had denied him prominent success and wealth,<sup>36</sup> he might have decided to speak about his 1838 (or 1839) adventure to Harar to recapture some of the achievements of his youth. In any case, we cannot deduce that Leigh was the first European to visit Harar, but inductively we are left with the alluring possibility that there may have been two sets of "first footsteps" into this region.

<sup>36</sup> In 1892 Leigh commented upon his "present slender income." Leigh to Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, March 8, 1892, Corr. Block 1881-1910, RGSA.